DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 580 EC 304 908

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TITLE Individual Education Plans in New Zealand Schools.
INSTITUTION Wellington Coll. of Education (New Zealand).
SPONS AGENCY Ministry of Education, Wellington (New Zealand). Research and Statistics Div.
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 61p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Content Analysis; Curriculum Development; *Disabilities; *Educational Planning; Educational Policy; Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; Inclusive Schools; *Individualized Education Programs; Models; Parent Attitudes; Participant Satisfaction; *Resource Allocation; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *New Zealand

ABSTRACT

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) has been adopted in New Zealand both as a method of planning instruction and as a method of obtaining additional, discretionary resources for students with special needs. This study investigated the IEP process for meeting the needs of students with disabilities in New Zealand schools. A random sample of 36 schools in one Ministry of Education district submitted 159 IEP forms for analysis. The analysis revealed that many of the key components outlined in guideline documents were not present or were unclear in the IEP. Through the use of focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires, the perceptions of parents and professionals were sought. Parents and teachers expressed high levels of satisfaction with the consultation, collaborative planning, and support aspects of the process. An alternative model of planning, more in keeping with curriculum initiatives, is outlined. Recommendations suggest reviewing the use of IEPs for the dual purpose of planning and access to resources, exploration of the concept of most inclusive practice, and testing of curriculum adaptation plans as an alternative to IEPs. Appendices provide definitions, the questionnaire, and information on curriculum adaptation planning. (Contains 34 references.) (Author/DB)

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INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS IN NEW ZEALAND SCHOOLS

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This research study was funded by the Research Section of the Ministry of Education.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the Individual Education Planning Process (IEP) in New Zealand schools. A random sample of 36 schools in one Ministry of Education district submitted 159 IEP forms for analyis. This analysis revealed that many of the key components outlined in guideline documents were not present in the document or were unclear. Issues regarding the utility of the document for planning and resource allocation are discussed. Through the use of focus groups, interviews and questionnaires the perceptions of parents and professionals were sought. Parents and teachers expressed high levels of satisfaction with the consultation, collaborative planning and support aspects of the process. Suggestions from parents and teachers for improving the process were outlined. Further research and review of the process was recommended. An alternative model of planning, more in keeping with recent curriculum initiatives, was outlined for consideration.

INTRODUCTION

Internationally, the use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) has become the accepted form of practice in establishing individual planning for students with special teaching needs. Originating in the United States of America, IEPs have been adopted in New Zealand both as a method of planning instruction and as a method of obtaining additional, discretionary resources for students with special needs.

The face validity of the IEP process has largely been accepted but overseas research would indicate that while the theory and principles of IEPs continue to be accepted the practice falls significantly short of the ideal for which IEPs were established.

Very little research has taken place in New Zealand into either the process or the outcomes of individual educational planning.

This small study looks at a sample of IEPs. It reports the comments of teachers, parents, psychologists and others who are part of the IEP process. This study is a first attempt at a significant analysis of the use of IEPs in New Zealand schools. It is limited to one large but representative district of New Zealand's demography. The study surveys the literature and the New Zealand scene within the context of the district selected.

The study does not attempt to go beyond an analysis of current practice in the development of IEPs and its implications in the delivery of special education in New Zealand. It was beyond the brief of this study to look at the translation of the planning document into classroom practice. Indeed, few studies have done so.

THE ORIGINS OF THE INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN

The United States

Individual education plans (IEPs) originated in the United States as the cornerstone and management tool of Public Law 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (1975). The use of IEPs was one of the six major mandates of the act. This act was passed in 1975 to ensure the right of all children with a disability to an appropriate education. The IEP was the means by which the aims and intentions of the act were to be put into practice: planning and resources would ensure an appropriate education for all children with a disability.

The Senate Sub Committee (1975) outlined three fundamental tenets for the IEP:

- each child requires an educational plan that is tailored to achieve his or her maximum potential,
- all principals in the child's environment, including the child, should have the opportunity for input,
- specific details must be given about goals, objectives and review.

According to the law and subsequent regulations, the IEP must include the following components (U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, cited in Gallagher and Desimone 1995):

- a statement of the child's present level of educational performance;
- annual goals and instructional objectives;
- a statement of the specific education services to be provided to the child;
- the projected date and anticipated duration of the services;
- objective evaluation criteria and evaluation procedures;
- a schedule for annual review of the child's programme;
- a statement of the extent to which the child can participate in regular education.

The plan was to be developed by an interdisciplinary team which included the parents and which specifically identified instructional goals for the child, the means of reaching those goals and how this goal achievement would be measured.

The American legislation outlines the requirements for IEPs in some detail, such as: how and when the parents will be informed and involved, who must participate at the meeting, time lines to be observed, and frequency of review.

In the United States the IEP is a legal requirement. Without an IEP no special education services can be delivered. Parents have rights under the law and can have legal redress if the process is not followed as mandated.

As Gallagher and Desimone (1995) point out, some of the elements of recent educational reform in the United States were preceded by reform issues in special

education in the 1960s and 1970s. Two of the major elements were accountability and parent involvement. The mandating of planning and evaluation of that plan made teachers and special education programmes more accountable. The mandating of parental participation in the IEP process was designed to increase parental influence in the child's programme.

Those elements of accountability and parental choice were key elements in the Tomorrow's Schools reforms in New Zealand in 1989. The underlying tenets of the IEP therefore fitted in well with the zeitgeist in New Zealand in that period of major educational reform. Indeed, both elements were already in practice in special education in New Zealand.

New Zealand

Public Law 94-142 had an influence on special education internationally. In the early 1980s practitioners in New Zealand were influenced by the American literature. Some psychologists in the then Psychological Service of the Department of Education began to introduce IEPs into their practice (Coleman, 1987). This was a grass roots development, supported by the administration but neither regulated nor demanded.

The concept of the IEP was very much in keeping with the principles of the New Zealand Draft Review of Special Education (Department of Education, 1987). Written after widespread consultation with interested groups, this document reflected much of the actual and emerging special education practices of the time and outlined the future directions for special education. The review had as two of its fundamental principles that:

- resources should be delivered on the basis of the needs of the learner and not on category of disability;
- all those most closely concerned with the child should be part of the decision making.

The review encouraged the further use of IEPs as they had validity as a tool for meeting the requirement of those two principles. The principles of the review validated IEPs as a tool for meeting the requirements of provision for all students with disabilities.

Under Tomorrow's Schools the substantive intent of the philosophy and principles of the Draft Review were adopted, as evidenced by the terms of the initial contract between the Ministry of Education and the Special Education Service (1990). This document stated that the individual plan would be central to service delivery in special education and outlined the criteria for an individual education plan.

Under this agreement the Special Education Service must ensure that every student on the roll of a special education unit, or for whom extra resources are required has a written programme plan developed for them. The contract goes on to list the criteria for an individual education plan. It must be:

- based on up to date assessment data gathered in the normal environments of the learner as far as possible by those in day-to-day contact with the learner;
- devised in consultation with those regularly involved with the care and education of the learner,
- contain specific objectives for the learner;
- detail teaching strategies and resource deployment to achieve those objectives;
- detail objective evaluation procedures.

The Special Education Service was were charged with ensuring education plans conformed to the above criteria.

In 1990 the Perris Task Force was set up to review special education delivery. It received over 250 submissions from advocacy groups, schools and parents. The task force defined an IEP as:

> *an educational plan designed to meet the specific current needs of a learner with special educational needs. It brings the learner, teacher, parents and others closely involved, together in a team to develop a meaningful plan for the identified learner for a specified time period, in a particular setting.* (p)

The task force proposed that

> *a system be developed in which special education provisions are targeted towards an individual education plan which is seen as a "top-up" over standard education provisions for the learners in that type of school....The operational grant would be supplemented by additional special education resources targeted to supporting the IEPs of particular learners on the school roll.*

The task force therefore confirmed the importance of the IEP process and now linked it with the allocation of funding to individual children.

In 1990 funding was allocated by the Ministry of Education for a national programme in professional development of teachers in the use of IEPs. The bulk of the funding was allocated to the Special Education Service with some also going to Auckland College of Education, Wellington College of Education and Massey University. As a result of that funding two major resources on the use of IEPs were produced - "Towards Inclusion" (undated) produced by the Special Education Service and "Individualised Education Planning" (Thomson 1991) produced by Massey University.

In the Special Education Service manual (undated) an IEP is defined thus:

> *An IEP is a written plan for a learner whose learn-ing(sic) needs are different to (sic) what is normally required for age mates and whose teaching needs require some change in the regular class or centre programme or environment.* (p 3.29)

The Special Education Service go on to say that an IEP establishes what a learner needs to learn, what resources are needed and who will do what, when and where.

As outlined in Towards Inclusion the essential characteristics of an IEP are listed as follows:

- learner's name and date of birth;
- date of planning meeting and the date when the plan will be reviewed;
- outline of what the learner can do in the specific areas being addressed;
- specific objectives outlining what needs to be achieved;
- resources that are necessary to achieve the objectives;
- tasks or responsibilities and who will carry them out;
- commitment to the plan by all team members. (p 3-7)

A long term goal is not included in this list. However, later in this document (p 3-14) teachers are advised to develop short term teaching objectives from "the longer term goals established as part of the IEP." (p3-14) Also outlined in this resource are the characteristics of the teaching objectives which should be: realistic, functional, observable and measurable.

Given that the Special Education Service is the organisation charged with the implementation of IEPs these are the characteristics that could reasonably be expected to be in evidence in IEP documents in New Zealand.

The NZEI has outlined their views on IEPs (NZEI 1991).

> *The Individual Education Plan (IEP) is the method now used for planning to meet the needs of students with special educational needs.... The IEP process has also become the mechanism by which discretionary resources are allocated to students with special teaching needs.* (p97)

While the NZEI report states that "there is at present no uniform view in New Zealand on how the IEP process should operate" (p97), it goes on to point out that there are "some common minimal factors" that must be present:

- consultation with the family;
- assessment of the student's strengths;
- consultation with all people concerned with the student's education,
- an IEP meeting where information is shared and decisions are made about major goals;
- developing these goals into short term teaching targets;
- a document that must specify what the long term goals are, how they will be achieved, who will be responsible, what support will be needed, how and when each goal will be evaluated;
- regular reviews of the IEP.

The Present Situation

There appears to be no official Ministry of Education policy on IEPs other than the requirement for the document in order to access discretionary resources. As noted above, the NZEI point out that there is no uniform view on how the process should operate. The implementation of the IEP process and guidelines for producing the IEP documents are the responsibility of the Special Education Service.

The Special Education Service is under contract to the Ministry of Education to provide professional advice on the needs of students with special needs. The ministry relies on the Special Education Service to make recommendations about allocations of discretionary resources "based on the IEP submitted with the application" (Ministry of Education 1994 p1).

Exactly what role the IEP documents play in the allocation of resources is unclear. It would appear to vary between districts. In some areas (e.g. Wellington), there is such demand on funding that only Priority 1 students are likely to receive it. Most of these students are known to the professionals and information other than that on the IEP is used as the basis of allocation (J Austin, personal communication, November 1995). The IEP may be used to supplement other information or to assist in deciding priority rankings.

The IEP therefore serves a dual purpose at present. It is a planning document for teaching and a document with which to access resources.

Summary

- As in the United States the IEP in New Zealand is presumed to be the "management tool" for the delivery of special education services. Here, unlike in the United States, IEPs do not have the status of legal documents; they are however an administrative requirement of the Ministry of Education.

- IEPs perform a dual function in special education delivery. They form the principal method of identifying educational needs and planning for students with special teaching needs. An IEP is required in order to access discretionary resources.

- There is a great deal of similarity in the characteristics of IEPs outlined in American legislation, ministry reports and documents and the Special Education Service's information and training documents. There are, however, no official policy documents on the characteristics of an IEP.

- There is general agreement that the IEP must be developed by those most closely concerned with the education of the child, including the parent. The IEP must set out goals, specific objectives, how those objectives are to be achieved, who will be responsible, what resources will be needed and how the plan will be evaluated.

The IEP is a key aspect of the delivery of special education services in New Zealand. It is a concept that has been taken from another culture and put into practice with little deviation from the original basic principles. While a large body of research literature has appeared in the United States in the twenty years since the inception of IEPs there has been little research on the process in New Zealand. Since the introduction of IEPs the emphasis appears to have moved from providing a planning document to a dual purpose of planning and obtaining resources. Neither purpose has been fully evaluated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there has been no substantive research in New Zealand on the development of IEPs, there is a substantial body of research in the American literature. A large number of studies took place in the late 1970s and early 1980s just after Public Law 94-142 had been introduced. There has been less recent research but as Gallagher and Desimone (1995) point out "...the results of the few studies that have been done show no marked differences from earlier work." (p 352)

In a review of individualised education programmes over the previous decade , Smith (1990a) concluded that the evidence pointed to "an inoperative IEP process and a questionable document" (p 6). His review of data-based and position papers from 1975 to 1989 revealed a history of IEP inadequacies and passive compliance to the mandates of the law.

Gallagher and Desimone (1995) identified three major categories emerging from the results of 15 years of research and evaluation of IEPs:

- shortcomings and difficulties in meeting the content requirements in IEP documents;
- process problems;
- positive outcomes.

Problems With IEP Content.

Missing data

Studies reveal that a significant amount of data are omitted from the IEP document. Schenk and Levy (1979) found that 64% of the IEPs they inspected did not include student performance levels and 20% did not include goals and objectives. Schenck (1981) found that almost one third of the IEPs examined did not report the current performance level; only 12% provided either goals or objectives; 80% had no review date; evaluation procedures were missing in 26% of the cases; evidence of parental approval was missing in 73%. Ten years later Smith and Simpson (1989) found that over one third of the documents lacked the necessary mandated components, indicating little noticeable change over time.

Poorly written goals and objectives

The literature indicates agreement that there needs to be improvement in the statement of goals and objectives. Gallagher and Desimone (1995) point out, "IEP goals and objectives, when they *are* present in the document are often limited in presentation."(p356)

Lynch and Bear (1990) found in their study that the objectives lacked specificity and were so vague as to be useless in judging successful performance or evaluation. The goals and objectives were based on the disability label and not the educational needs of

the student. Smith and Simpson (1989) found that too few goals were developed and that objectives were too difficult to achieve.

Unclear link of goals with assessment, programme and evaluation.

Schenck and Levy (1979) pointed out that if there are no performance level data, as they found in a large proportion of IEPs, then one must question the validity of the goals and objectives. Schenck (1981) found that goals and objectives had limited foundation in the assessment data. Ysseldyke, Algozinne, Richey and Graden (1982) found little congruence between the data presented at IEP meetings and the instructional decisions reached, thus raising questions about the content and appropriateness of IEP objectives. Smith and Simpson (1989) noted incongruences between the performance statements and the goals.

Smith (1990b) found that there was no link between the goals and the intended instruction.

> *An assumption was made prior to conducting this investigation that students' IEPs would adequately and appropriately describe and orchestrate an individualised instructional program. That is, each student's present level of performance would serve as the basis for IEP annual goal and objectives. This basic link between student need and program availability represents the very essence of special education and specially designed instruction. Results from this study, however, did not support this assumption. These data serve as evidence that a substantial number of IEPs written for students with learning disabilities failed to function as effective instructional guides."* (p97).

Gallagher and Desimone (1995) hypothesised that insufficient assessment information and lack of training to help teachers learn the appropriate skills may be the major contributors to the problem of congruence in the separate sections of the IEP.

Lack of evidence of monitoring

Information on monitoring does not appear frequently in the literature. Smith and Simpson(1989) noted that teachers did not record when objectives were completed and in general there appeared to be many inadequacies in the monitoring process (Smith 1990a).

Process Inadequacies

Demands on teacher time

Morgan and Rhode (1983) found that teachers were extremely concerned that the IEP process put demands on their time. Price and Goodman (cited in Gallagher and Desimone 1995) found that teachers were required to spend a significant amount of non-school personal time on IEP development. They also found, however, that more experienced teachers spent less time on the process.

Lack of consistent parent involvement

Despite the fact that parent participation is intended to be an essential element in the IEP, studies would indicate that parent involvement is inconsistent and less than would be desired. Gallagher and Desimone (1995) cite a number of studies where some of the basic legal requirements in the United States regarding parent rights are not met - parents' signatures were missing; checks for awareness of due process rights and actual receipt of the document were not in evidence. (Schenk & Levy, 1979; Say, Mc Collum & Brightman, 1980)

Vaughn, Bos, Harrell and Lasky (1988) found little difference in parent participation in the IEP process from studies carried out ten years previously (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981; Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull & Curry, 1980, Yoshida, Fenton, Kaufman, & Maxwell, 1978). They maintain that this type of comparison demonstrates, "That parent participation at IEP conferences continues to remain at the same low level, despite numerous suggestions and programs for parent advocacy training." (p87)

However, the researchers noted that across studies, including theirs, (Goldstein & Turnbull, 1982, Witt, Miller, McIntyre and Smith, 1984). there was a consistently high level of parent satisfaction with the IEP meetings. Although they found a wide variance in parent participation at IEP meetings, overall parent participation in the IEP remained passive. They raise the issue of whether it is realistic to expect all parents to participate at the level mandated by the law. They point out that:

> *The passage of P.L. 94-142 dramatically reconceptualized the role of parents in the educational decision-making process to that of program participant and partner. However, a decade later, the research indicates that although the intent of the law endures, the change has not occurred.* (p88)

Positive Outcomes

In their review of the research, Gallagher and Desimone (1995) concluded that the results were not all negative and a number of advantages were highlighted.

Better relationships

The IEP is an opportunity for parents and professionals to meet together to discuss the needs of the child and their concerns about the child (Goodman and Bond, 1993).

Vaughn, Bos, Harrell and Lasky (1988) , although finding that parents did not have high levels of participation in the IEP meetings, found that they expressed satisfaction with these meetings.

Clarification of programme goals and directions

Although Morgan and Rhodes study (1983) identified some negative perceptions of teachers it also indicated that the process helped teachers to organise their time, clarify their goals and focus on their teaching strategies.

The teachers in Dudley-Marling's (1985) study indicated that the IEP had some utility in assisting them to develop programmes. They maintained that they would "most probably write IEPs even if not required to do so by law, although probably in a form different from that now used." (p66) Say, McCollum and Brightman (cited in Gallagher and Desimone, 1995) found that the IEP process, especially parent involvement, increased the accuracy and completeness of the IEP.

The Relationship of the IEP to Instruction

The emphasis in the research has been on examination of the procedural requirements of IEPs. There is little research which evaluates the relationship of IEPs to academic outcomes. This may be because it is difficult to measure.

Smith (1990b) found that there was little congruence between the goals and objectives stated in IEPs and instructional content and practice. Yselldyke, Algozzine, Richey and Graden (1982) found little congruence between assessment data presented at the meeting and the instructional decisions reached by the team. Morgan and Rhode (1983) found that it was the perception of teachers that they could teach just as effectively and students could learn at least as much without the use of IEPs. Most of the teachers in their study found the IEP to be an administrative rather than an instructional task, a finding replicated by Banbury (1987). Lynch and Bear (1990) described the IEP as "an imperfect indicator of daily instruction."(p54) and found little relationship between written IEPs and instruction. Dudley-Marling (1985) found that the IEPs were locked away most of the time and not referred to often.

The lack of congruence between the component parts of the IEP document led Smith and Simpson (1989) to conclude that IEPs failed to function as effective instructional guides. They concluded that unless there is a qualitative educational difference in the instructional programme, the IEP process is "not worth the effort." (p115)

Margolis and Truesdell (1987), reviewing a number of studies in this area, concluded that IEPs had failed to become working documents that influenced instruction. Lynch and Baere (1990) reflect the essence of many of these studies when they ask, "Is the IEP a guide for teaching or has it simply become a legal requirement to be fulfilled?" (p54)

Conclusion

The literature identifies a number of problems with IEPs including poorly written documents, lacking congruence, with essential mandated components missing and suggests that their utility for classroom practice is not high.

It also identifies a number of positive features such as good communication between teachers and parents and clarification of programme directions.

The literature reviewed is almost entirely American based. This study looks at the IEP documents produced in New Zealand and surveys parents and teachers for perceptions of the process.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The general methodology used in this study is that of qualitative enquiry. It reflects the desire to collect qualitative and quantitative data around the research issue. Data were collected on the presence of IEPs in schools, their usage, views and attitudes toward them from a number of significant people involved and, finally, comparisons were made with practice in North America where the concept of IEPs originated.

Care was taken to align data in such a way that cross referencing of views was possible.

An appropriate sample of schools was taken to obtain a representative range of IEPs in current use. Data were taken from this sample to establish the parameters of IEP usage. Focus groups were used to identify the issues which were in need of further investigation. A questionnaire was devised to gather further information on use, views, attitudes and opinions of the IEP process and usage. Semi structured interviews were used to promote a free flow of information from participants, in clarifying and elaborating upon critical issues in the use and utility of IEPs.

Sixty schools were selected randomly from the Ministry of education SEAL data base. The sample size for the study comprised 10% of total school numbers in the Wellington, Nelson, Marlborough, West Coast regions.

These areas were selected to reflect New Zealand's demographics e.g. rural, town and urban areas. Secondary, primary, special schools, and attached units were included in the sample.

In order to consider the administrative and professional requirements for IEPs, every office of the Ministry of Education and the Special Education Service was contacted. Each office was requested to provide any guidelines or circulars which advised upon or required IEP formats, content or other details (e.g. presence of parents or caregivers at meetings).

Data from IEP forms were analyses by two researchers. An independent adviser was asked to consider the methods for obtaining reliability and the levels achieved. Reliability was established on a sub set of data before the forms used for this study were analysed. Reliability was established at the 85% level.

Numerical data from the questionnaires were checked by two researchers for accuracy. Following discussion on allocation to categories of the qualitative data, the questionnaires were checked by two researchers independently to ensure reliable allocation. The data were allocated to a list of themes and ideas. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and final allocations made.

A similar process was used for the analysis of data from the focus groups and the interviews. Taped transcripts and written notes were analysed for patterns and themes emerging. These data were considered by two researchers. Allocations to theme categories was checked for agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion and final allocations made.

Ethics And Negotiation Of Entry

Letters were sent to principals and staff at the selected schools, outlining the research objectives and any information of the process that was relevant. Principals were asked to discuss the research with staff.

Letters were sent to five parents at each selected school, informing parents of the research process and confidentiality issues. The letters ensured parents were giving informed consent.

Data Collection

The data were collected through a number of methods:

1. IEP documents
2. focus groups
3. questionnaires
4. interviews.

Triangulation of data collection enabled different perceptions of the IEP process to be gathered and evaluated.

1. IEP Documents

The IEPs collected were for the 1994 school year. IEPs reviewed were for those students who had been identified by class teachers as requiring extra assistance. Schools were asked to submit three consecutive IEPs for five students (if applicable).

IEP Assessment

Each IEP was assessed using two approaches. The first focused on the format used for each IEP. The researchers analysed the current literature in IEP and special education. They extracted the topical issues and the main components seen as essential elements of the document and used these to generate analysis forms. Noted were those people involved in each IEP process and whether goals, objectives, assessment, teaching strategies and evaluation procedures were recorded. It was also noted whether initiation and review dates were present and whether there was any indication of individuals responsible for implementation.

The second part analysed the substantive content of each IEP. The following steps were taken:

1. the number of objectives present were recorded for each submitted IEP;

2. five objectives, one from each of the first five subject areas on the IEP form were analysed to determine whether the objectives were indeed objectives;

3. the links between the objective and goals, the objective and assessment statements and the objective and teaching strategies were analysed. (see Appendix A for definitions);

4. assessment statements, if present, were categorised as data based or descriptive;

5. teaching strategies were analysed for their classroom usage e.g. inclusive, individual, or one-to-one;

6. it was noted if there was indication of responsibility for implementation of each objective.

2. Focus Groups

Focus groups were set up to gauge opinions and perceptions of the IEP by those involved in the process. Two researchers attended each focus group meeting. Reports were kept by audio and written record. One researcher maintained both records throughout the meetings to ensure the other could maintain group cohesion and an uninterrupted flow of discussion.

Two teacher focus groups met. The first a group of teachers were from schools within the Wellington region, all currently using IEPs in their classrooms The second focus group comprised teachers on Course A and B, Diploma in the Education of Students with Special Teaching Needs, a range of primary and secondary teachers all with an interest and awareness of the IEP process.

Two parent "mainstreaming parent support groups" formed the third and forth focus groups.

The discussion sessions were guided by a set of semi-structured questions.

Focus Group Assessment

Data gathered during focus group meetings were analysed by identifying common themes and recurring ideas.

3. Questionnaires

The random sample group of schools and teachers were further surveyed through a questionnaire. Those teachers who had written IEPs were asked to complete a written questionnaire to ascertain their levels of training, perceived strengths and weaknesses of the IEP process and other perceptions of the IEP for teaching purposes. Fifty-nine questionnaires were returned. (See Appendix B for Questionnaire Form).

Questionnaire Analysis

Data for questions 1, through 6 were collated to give mean percentages. Common themes were noted in the qualitative responses in questions 7, through 10, from teacher perceptions.

4. Interviews

One school was selected for in-depth interviewing. The school was selected on the basis that analysis of the IEP documents indicated a satisfactory written standard. Transcripts were recorded on tape and written notes.

The principal, teachers and itinerant teachers of students with special needs were interviewed separately using a semi-structured interview format. Interviews were carried out to gain more detailed perceptions of those directly involved in the process.

One interview was conducted with a Special Education Service regional manager. The manager in the Wellington district was selected purely by location. It is reasonable to expect that this highly experienced officer with prior national office experience is representative of special education service views. The semi-structured interview format was used. The purpose was to gain an insight into the service's role in the IEP process.

Assessment of Interviews

Taped transcripts and written notes were analysed for patterns and themes emerging.

RESULTS

IEP Form Analysis

IEP forms were received from 36 schools: 27 primary, 5 secondary and 4 special schools or units. Geographically, 44% of the IEPs were from the Wellington/ Kapiti area, 25% from Nelson Area, 4% Westport, 6% Picton/ Blenhiem, and 6% from Masterton. Eight per cent of the respondents failed to indicate the school and area.[1]

It should be noted that one residential special school was involved in this survey. It is likely that this may have had an effect upon the balance of some of the results. For example, in residential special schools objectives are written for activities which involve the residential component of education and a mix of residential and classroom activities. The number of objectives is likely to be higher in such a case.

A total of 159 IEP forms were received.

IEP Format

The IEP forms were analysed using the analysis procedure referred to in the methodology section. The categories used, including such items as date of meeting were listed. Table 1 shows the percentage of times each category was present on the IEP document.

From this analysis the following information was gained. Parents took part in 55% of the IEP meetings . In 59% of the documents there was some form of assessment. Teaching strategies were present in 96% of the IEP forms with 83% of the IEPs noting who was responsible for implementing the strategies. Eighty nine% of the IEPs included some form of written objectives. The IEPs had a class teacher or special education teacher present 60% or 43% of the time respectively. Sixteen per cent of the forms had no indication of a teacher being present at all. Evaluation was present in 14 % of the documents. Members of the Special Education Service, e.g. psychologists, speech language therapists and advisors of the deaf were present 19% of the time. Other outside agencies, e.g. physiotherapists, occupational therapists were present at the meetings 19% of the time. Table 1 shows the data in detail.

[1] All results are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 1

Mean Frequencies of Items Included in IEP Forms as a Percentage

Format of IEPS	
Included on Form	**% of times included on Form**
Date	93
Review Date	55
Parent Present	55
Teacher Present	60
Student	4.0
Special ED Teacher	43
Principal	14
Psychologist	6
Visiting Teacher	0
Speech Language	8
Advisor for Deaf	5
Maori Advisor	0
Medical	0
Teacher Aide	20
Other e.g. Physio, OT	19
Long Term Goal	70
Objectives	90
Teaching Strategies	96
Assessment	59
Evaluation	14
Responsibility - Sometimes	83
Never	10
Always	7

IEP Content

The number of objectives written was calculated for each IEP form received. The mean number of objectives for each sector is shown in Table 2. Many of the objectives written in the documents were not assessed as objectives by the researchers. (i.e. 45% assessed as objectives for primary schools, 55% for secondary and 60% for special schools and units). It appears from the following examples that the objectives did not meet the guidelines published by Special Education Service: that the objectives are realistic, measurable, functional and observable.

- "Get data from maths teacher." (a process statement of teacher role)
- "Get a U shaped desk with an edge, lift up lid and raised attachment." (A resource required for a student)
- "To build up quantity in Maths." (no indication of what, how much, how often)
- "To encourage present interest and ability in written language." (this objective had no assessment data attached and no strategy of how the teacher was going to do this)
- "Will learn to spell any word phonetically " (from a special school IEP form)

Although many of the IEP forms included teaching strategies, the researchers noted low numbers met commonly accepted notions of what a strategy is (Thomson 1991) nor were they actually teaching strategies. Strategies listed on IEP forms from the three kinds of schools (primary, secondary and special schools) were analysed. Thirty-five per cent of those listed met a reasonable criterion of a strategy for advancing learning. At secondary level, 37% met the criterion, and 67% from the special schools.

Those listed strategies considered by the researchers as meeting the criteria noted above were then analysed according to style of programming approaches: inclusive, one:one or individual. One:one, and individual approaches were the most used strategies.There were 40% one:one in style at primary schools, 41% in secondary and 54 % one:one in special schools and units. Individual programmes were stated 28% of the time for primary students, 27% of the time for secondary students and 35% in special schools (see Appendix A for definitions of strategies).

Less than half of the IEPs contained any form of assessment data. The assessment statements were classified as data based or descriptive. The data based assessment ranged from 10% for secondary schools to 17% for primary schools, the descriptive assessment from 35% for special schools to 21% for secondary schools. Indications of who was responsible for implementation ranged from 100% in special schools to 56 % in primary schools (see Table 2).

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Table 2

Nature of Essential Components of IEPs

		Primary %	Secondary %	Special Schools %
No of Objectives		12.6	19.9	33.6
Percentage of objectives judged to be valid.		45	55	60
Percentage of valid objectives written in specific terms		21	20	31
Assessment	- Data based	17	10	16
	- Descriptive	22	21	35
Percentage of strategies judged to be valid		35	37	67
Percentage of valid strategies written in	- specific terms	9	1	20
Which were	- inclusive	21	21	12
	- one one	40	41	54
	- individual	28	27	35
	- not clear	11	11	0
Indications of Responsibility		56	65	100

Table 3

Congruence of Components of IEPs

	Primary	Secondary	Special Schools
Objective linked to goal	38.85	26.6	49.0
Objective linked to assessment	41.8	35.3	52.7
Objectives linked to strategies	72.8	78.8	96.4

The congruency of links in the IEP documents between the objectives, goals, assessment and strategies were noted. In this section no account was taken by the researchers as to the quality of each of the categories. Instead the teachers' perceptions of what constituted goals, assessment statements and strategies were used.

Objectives were often not linked to goals or assessment statements. For secondary schools 27% of objectives written on the documents were linked to a goal with only 35 % of the objectives linked to assessment statements. Secondary documents linked objectives to strategies 79% of the time. Primary schools had higher figures with 39% of objectives linked to goals, 42% to assessment, but a slightly lower 73% of the objectives linked to strategies. Special schools/units had the highest levels of linkages with 49% of the objectives linked to goals, 96 % to the strategies and 53% of the objectives linked to assessment data (see Table 3).

The following examples illustrate the lack of links between objectives, assessment, strategies and goals.

Assessment	Objectives	Strategies
On an instructional text (5-1/2 year level) he scored 97% accuracy on a running record	Journal stories which A enjoys will be shared.	T.A. will continue to work with A until end of term.
A is slow to settle in his maths group and he seeks help from T.A. rather than peers.	Work on BSM maths.	Withdraw A to minimise distraction and encourage on task behaviour.

Questionnaire Analysis

Questionnaires were sent to schools involved in the sample. 59 forms were returned by teachers currently using IEPs. Analysis of the results indicated that 53% of the teachers had received training in their use. Of those who had received training, 38% felt that training had been adequate while 48% stated that their training had been good. The Special Education Service was cited as the source of training by the highest number of teachers (37%), with college of education indicated by 25% of the respondents. Colleagues had been the source of training for 19% of the teachers and a special education teacher for 14%. Table 4 shows the results from this section of the survey.

Forty-four percent of the teachers considered the IEP process helpful in assisting the teaching of students with special needs, 34% considered it very helpful. All teachers found the IEP process for general teaching purposes useful in some way, 59% helpful, 39% very helpful. The teachers noted that many of them would take part in the IEP process if there were no requirement to do so for resources (76%).

The qualitative data set out below are expressed in numbers of responses. The highest number of responses to any one question was 55. The lowest response rate was 2.

Table 4

Summary of Questionnaire Results

Percentages of Teacher responses

Training Received%		Yes	No		
%		53	47		
Satisfaction with Training		Not Satisfactory	Adequate	Good	Excellent
%		13	38	40	9
Source of Training	A Colleague	SES	SES Teacher	College of Education	Other
%	19	37	14	25	5
How helpful was the process	Not Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful	Ext Helpful	Didn't Say
%	0	44	34	8	14
How useful is the IEP document		Not Helpful	Helpful	Very Helpful	Didn't Say
%		0	59	39	2
Would you take part in IEP process if there was no requirement to do so for resources			Yes	No	Didn't Say
%			76	17	7

Identification of teaching needs and communication with parents were the major advantages of the IEP process noted by the teachers surveyed, with 53 and 55 responses respectively. Access to outside agencies followed with 31 responses. Other advantages included accountability for staff and individual students and student involvement in the process. The disadvantages were categorised under the headings of time and training. The teachers felt the IEP process to be time consuming and that there is a general lack of training and updating for teachers on the process. Other disadvantages were the teachers' perceptions that the process was threatening for some parents, and a lack of support for the class teachers involved (See Figures 1-4).

Teachers were also asked to comment on how they thought the IEP process might be improved. The responses fitted clearly into 6 areas:

a) training,
b) within schools,
c) the form,
d) support and time,
e) funding,
f) for parents.

(see Figure 5).

Focus Groups Analysis

Teacher Focus Groups

The teachers in the focus groups stated the strengths of the IEP process clearly lay in the team approach taken to work effectively for the student, the parental involvement, the shared responsibility, and the holistic view of the student when different people involved in the student's life are bought together. (Figure 6a).

Teachers saw the lack of time and training as the most prevalent weakness of the IEP process, and the IEP process to be culturally unfriendly. (Figure 6b).

Information was also gathered from these teachers about how they felt the IEP process could be improved. Figure 7 presents the eight areas noted by the teachers as needing to be changed:

a) time factor,
b) the meeting,
c) cultural issues,
d) communication,
e) consistency of format and structure,
f) training,
g) students involved,
h) clarification of the process and roles, power.

Figure 1 - Questionnaire

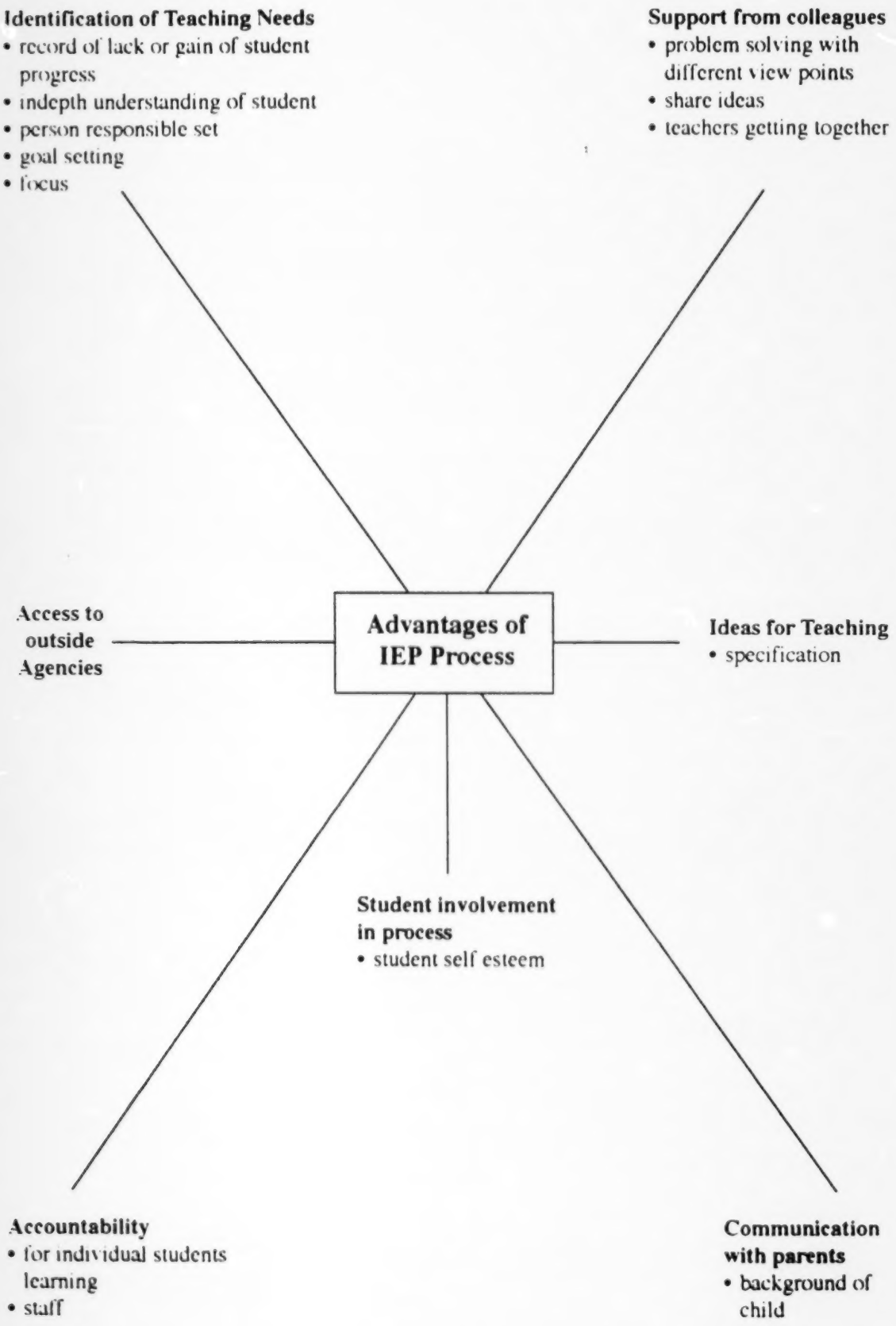
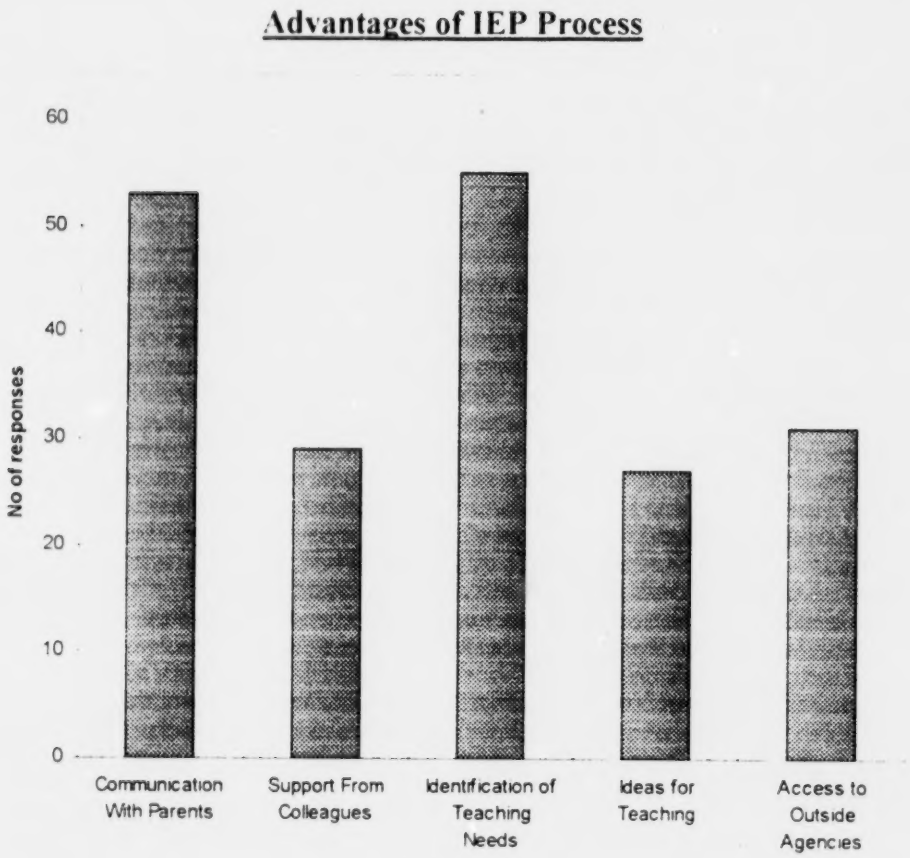


Figure 2 - Questionnaire



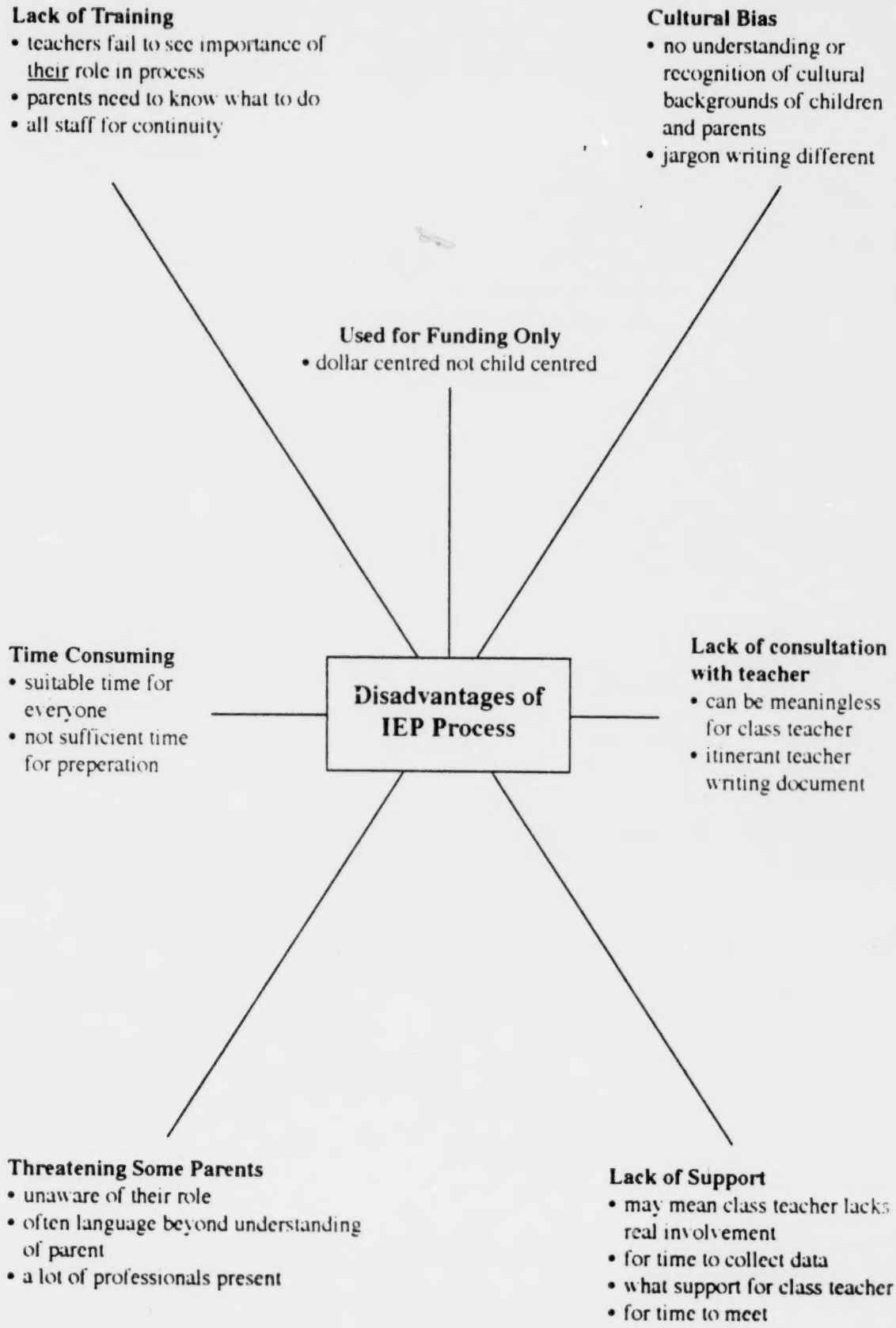

Lack of Training
• teachers fail to see importance of their role in process
• parents need to know what to do
• all staff for continuity
Cultural Bias
• no understanding or recognition of cultural backgrounds of children and parents
• jargon writing different
Used for Funding Only
• dollar centred not child centred
Time Consuming
• suitable time for everyone
• not sufficient time for preperation
Disadvantages of IEP Process
Lack of consultation with teacher
• can be meaningless for class teacher
• itinerant teacher writing document
Threatening Some Parents
• unaware of their role
• often language beyond understanding of parent
• a lot of professionals present
Lack of Support
• may mean class teacher lacks real involvement
• for time to collect data
• what support for class teacher
• for time to meet

Figure 4 - Questionnaire

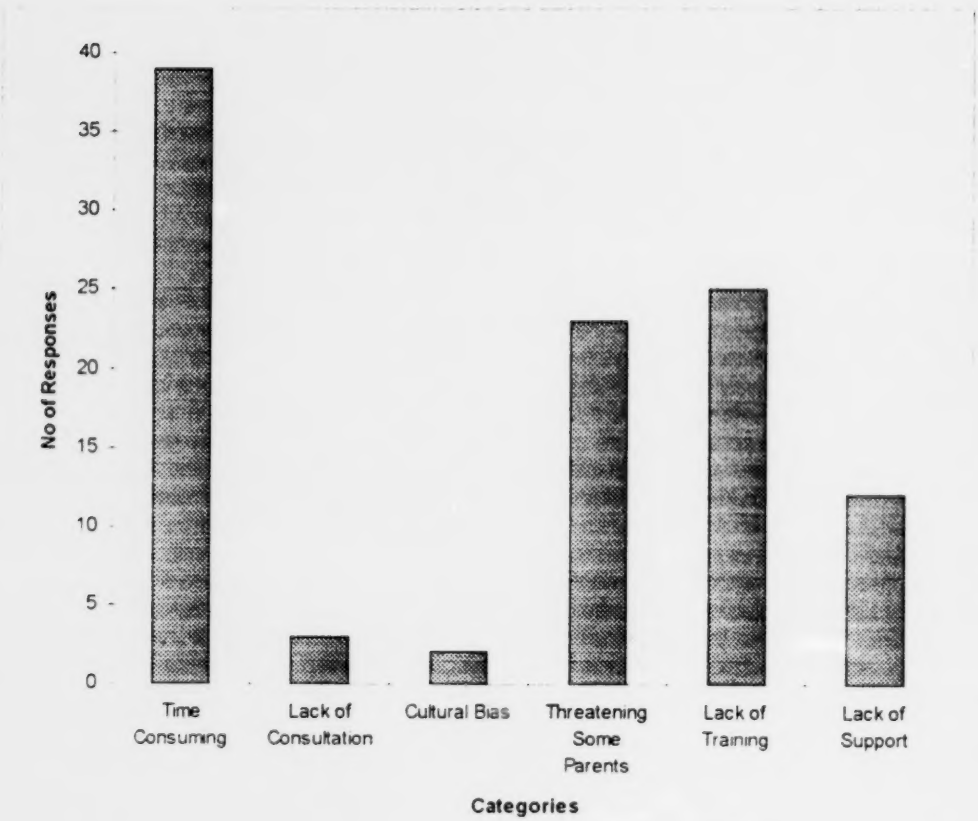
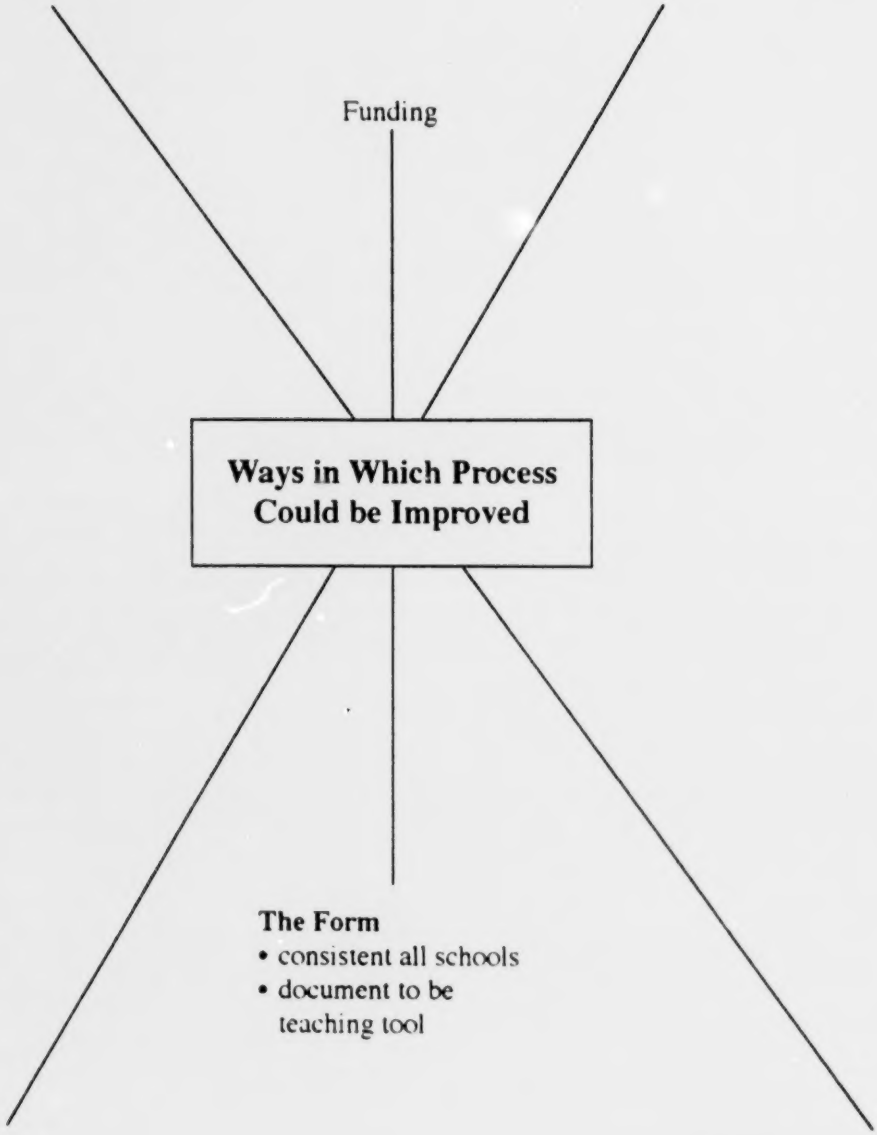


Figure 5 - Questionnaire

Training
- pre-service training
- involve-teacher aide
- training manuals
- professional development for all teachers
- meeting skills training

Support and Time
- pre-meeting preperation
- time for writing document
- contact with collegues who are also implementing IEPs
- time management



The Form
- consistent all schools
- document to be teaching tool

Schools
- updating of information
- release time
- ongoing professional development
- support for new teachers

Parents
- keep IEP team small
- interpret jargon
- choice of venue
- survey parents

Figure 6a - Focus Group

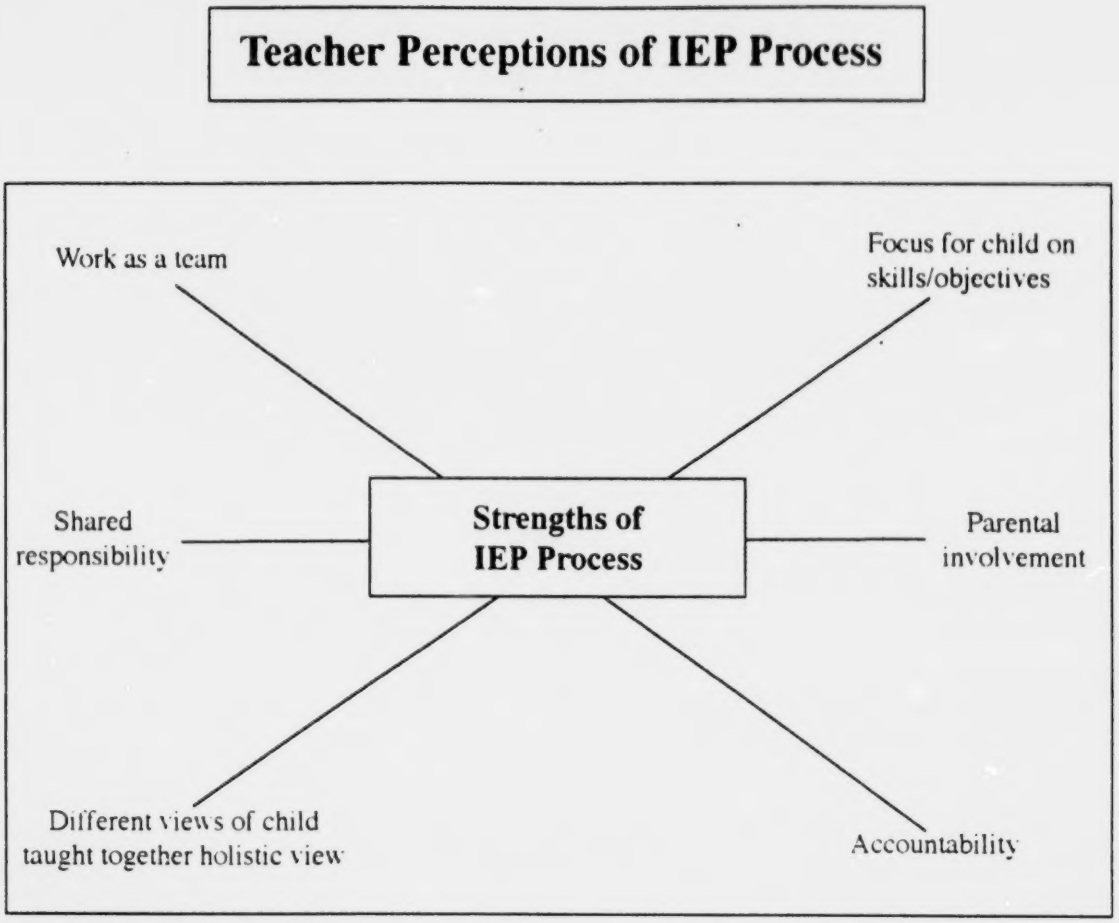


Figure 6b - Focus Group

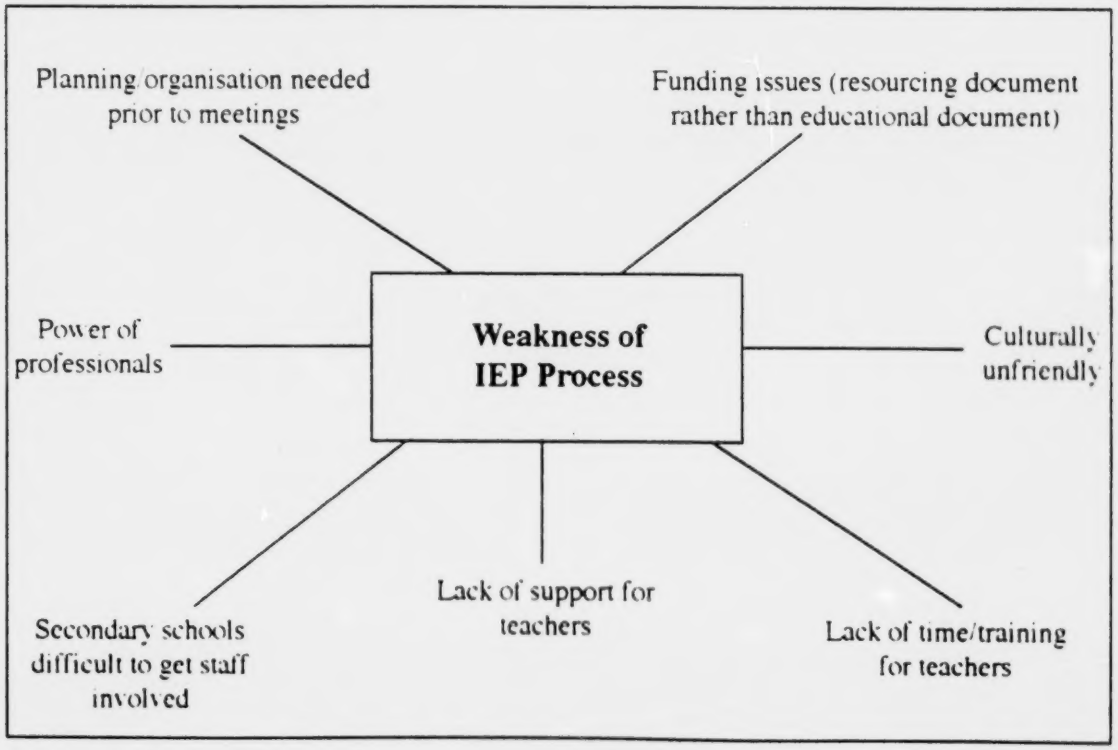
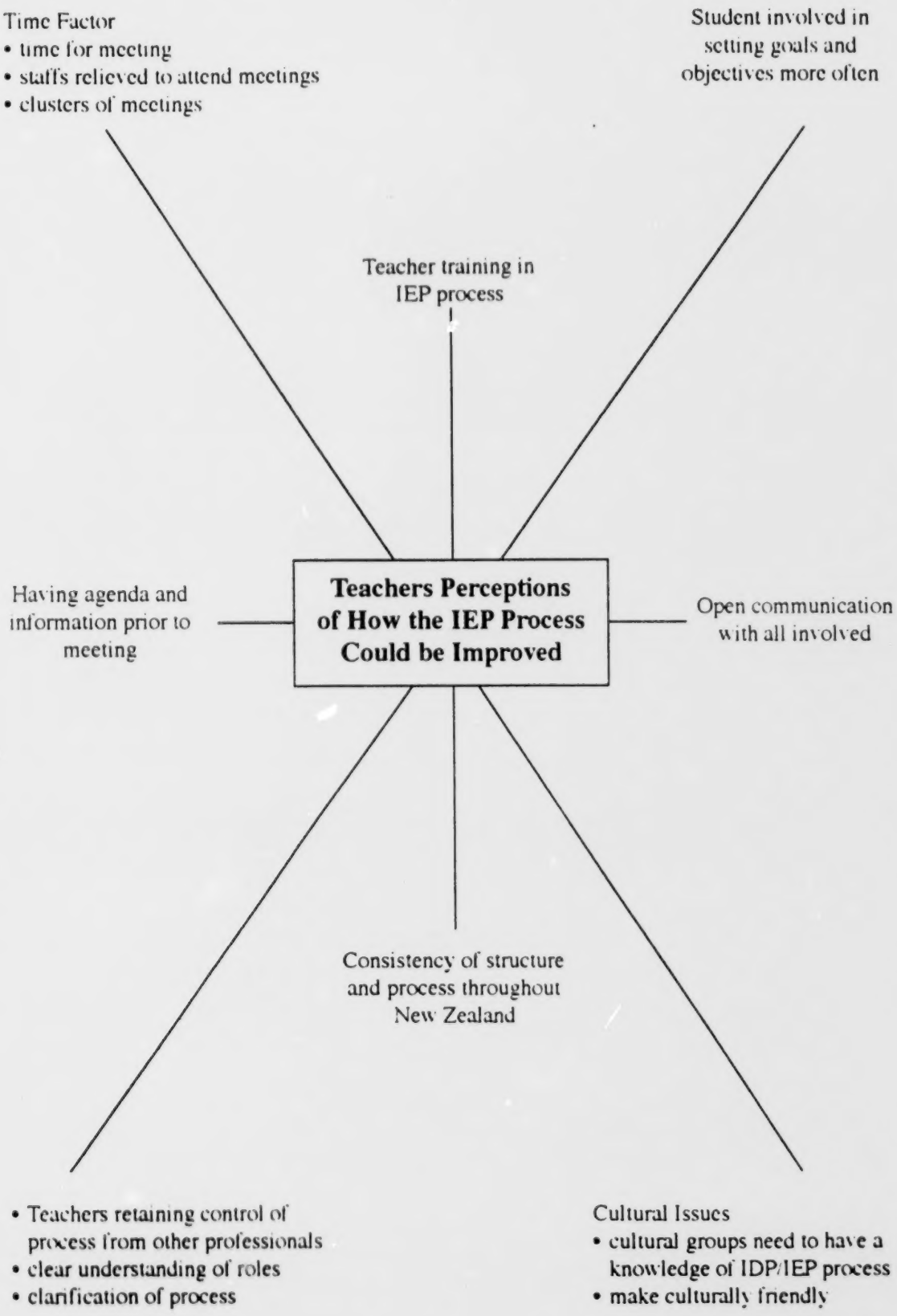

Planning organisation needed prior to meetings
Funding issues (resourcing document rather than educational document)
Power of professionals
Weakness of IEP Process
Culturally unfriendly
Secondary schools difficult to get staff involved
Lack of support for teachers
Lack of time/training for teachers

Figure 7 - Focus Group


Time Factor
• time for meeting
• staffs relieved to attend meetings
• clusters of meetings
Student involved in setting goals and objectives more often
Teacher training in IEP process
Having agenda and information prior to meeting
Teachers Perceptions of How the IEP Process Could be Improved
Open communication with all involved
Consistency of structure and process throughout New Zealand
• Teachers retaining control of process from other professionals
• clear understanding of roles
• clarification of process
Cultural Issues
• cultural groups need to have a knowledge of IDP/IEP process
• make culturally friendly

Parent Focus Groups

Perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the IEP process were gathered from the parents too. Figure 8a and 8b parents clearly focused on four main strengths of the process:

a) partnership between parents and teachers;
b) focusing on needs and directions of child ;
c) teachers involved on the process;
d) assists transitions e.g. from school to school, class to class.

They described the weaknesses under the following areas:

a) meetings;
b) resources and training.

In general the parents didn't enjoy going to meetings. They were unsure of their role. They felt there were too many people attending. The parents felt that both teachers and parents had very little training in the process and found great variations between schools in the standards of teacher training and involvement. The lack of continuity of resourcing was also cited as a weakness (see Figure 9).

Finally parents were asked how IEPs could be improved. They considered pupils should have;

a. more input,
b. equal share of power,
c. opportunity to give more information,

They also believe;

a. professionals should be more welcoming,
b. recognise privacy act more,
c. there should be more training for teachers,
d. meetings should be more culturally sensitive,
e. students should be involved more often.

Figure 8a - Focus Group

Parents Perceptions of IEP Process

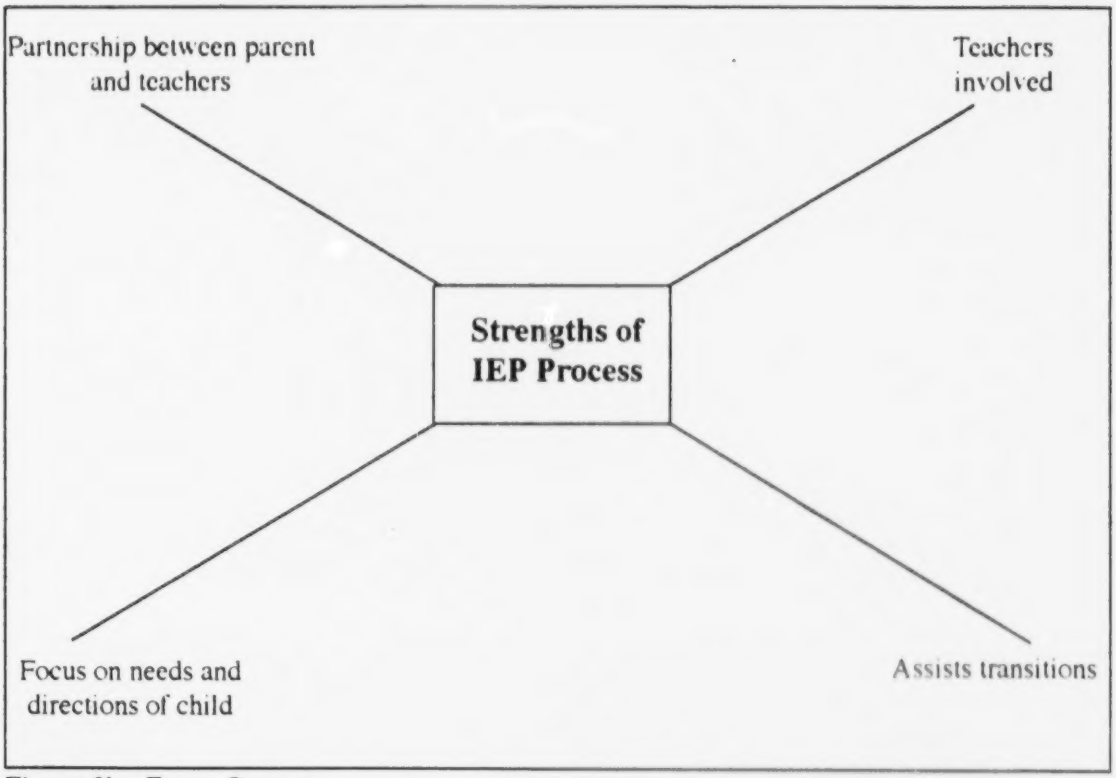

Partnership between parent and teachers
Teachers involved
Strengths of IEP Process
Focus on needs and directions of child
Assists transitions

Figure 8b - Focus Group

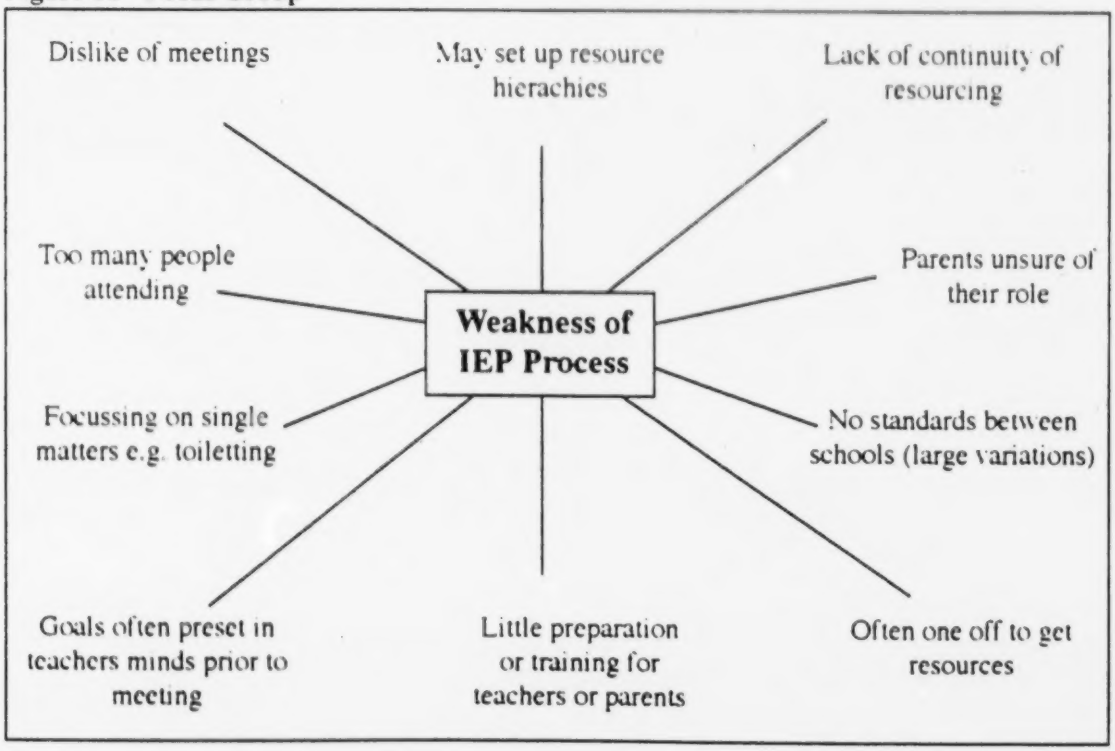
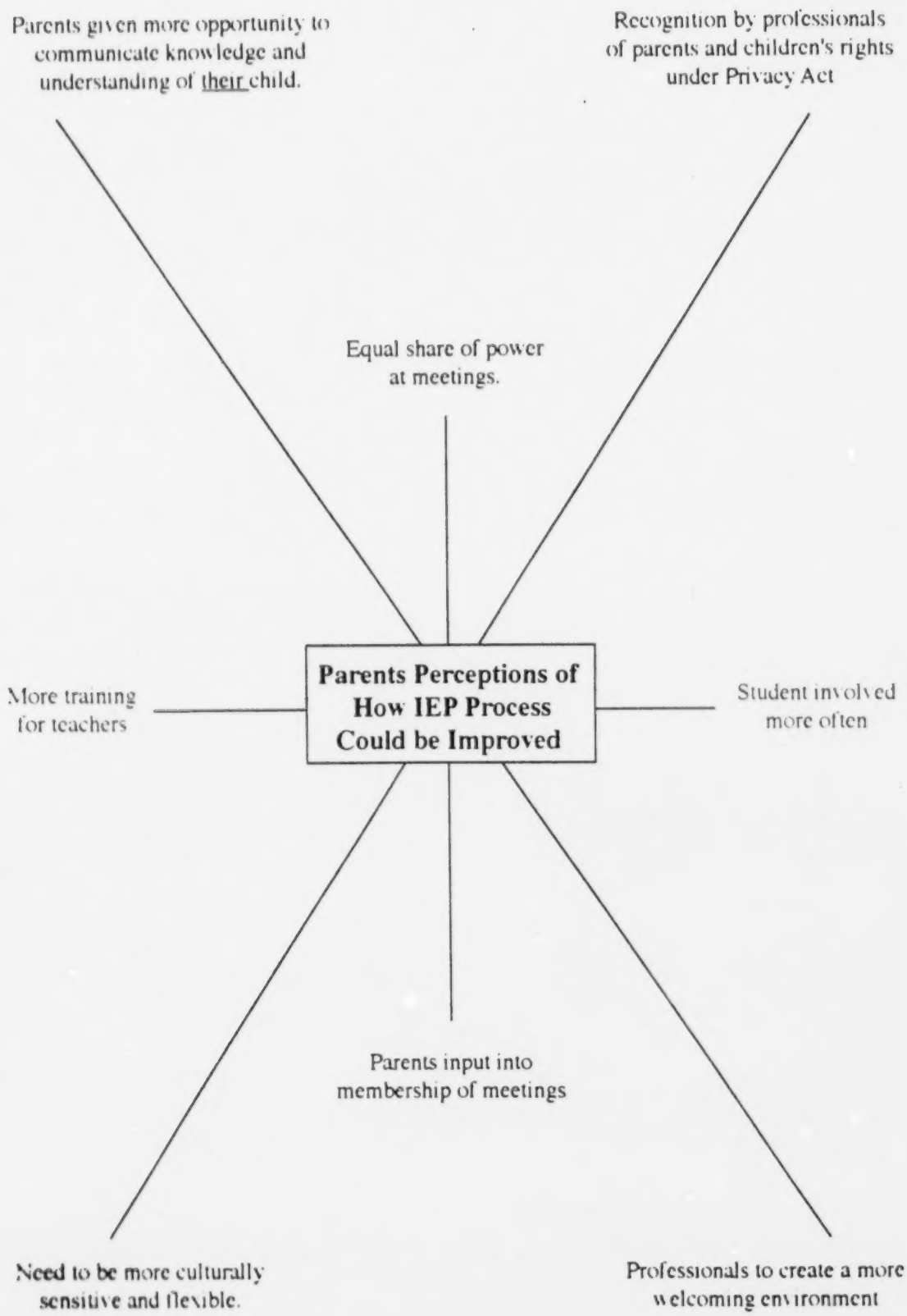

Dislike of meetings
May set up resource hierachies
Lack of continuity of resourcing
Too many people attending
Parents unsure of their role
Weakness of IEP Process
Focussing on single matters e.g. toiletting
No standards between schools (large variations)
Goals often preset in teachers minds prior to meeting
Little preparation or training for teachers or parents
Often one off to get resources

Figure 9 - Focus Group


Parents given more opportunity to communicate knowledge and understanding of their child.
Recognition by professionals of parents and children's rights under Privacy Act
Equal share of power at meetings.
More training for teachers
Parents Perceptions of How IEP Process Could be Improved
Student involved more often
Parents input into membership of meetings
Need to be more culturally sensitive and flexible.
Professionals to create a more welcoming environment

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Components of the IEP document

The findings of this study relating to the analysis of the IEP documents is in keeping with the American research - a large proportion of the required components are missing on the forms and in a large number of cases there is lack of congruence or internal "match" in the document. Essential data for effective programming, such as assessment information, is missing in the majority of IEP forms. It is difficult to see how many of the documents could translate into effective teaching programmes.

The clear replication of the very same factors as evidenced in the American literature in this New Zealand study, where no legal requirement exists, may support the notion that the demands are either too difficult to meet or are considered insufficiently important by teachers and other professionals.

An alternative explanation is that, as practitioners, teachers do not plan in the way that the IEP document demands. This would indicate that ways should be explored to assist teachers to fit the planning for individual students' needs into a classroom plan that is more in keeping with regular practice.

The issue of training may also be significant and is dealt with later in this discussion. While teachers are concerned at their lack of training, it is also possible that the lack of clear guideline documents from official sources plays some part. 'Official' policy documents on IEPs are not available. There appears, in our devolved system, no centralised procedures or guidelines to ensure the effective implementation of the IEP process. The Special Education Service is the agency charged with ensuring that resources are allocated to students with special needs. There are district variations in their methods of operating and their nationally produced training manual is not available in all schools.

Teachers may also be having difficulty in working to the dual purposes of the IEP - planning a programme and making a case for resources. It could be argued that these do not sit easily together.

Since it is clear from the results reported here, that IEPs are written in such a way that a disinterested reader would have difficulty putting a programme in place from the document, one may conclude that what is in the teachers' minds is different from what is in the document.

The majority of teachers claim that the document is useful. Yet this study reveals that a majority of the documents do not make clear statements about the entry skills of students, the proposed objectives and the programme options. The notion that the document and teachers' intentions are different is strengthened.

Do IEPs constitute a focusing activity rather than a blueprint for programming?

Teachers in Dudley-Marling's (1985) study said that they would probably write IEPs if not required to do so by law, although probably in a different form. Much the same was said by the New Zealand teachers in this study. It might be timely to explore teachers' views on planning and how they might best incorporate planning for students with special needs into their regular classroom planning activities.

It is not possible from this study to say whether the high level of usefulness found by teachers in the IEP process translates into effective programme outcomes.

Lack of Standardisation of the Form

There was a wide variation in the format of the IEP document.

The format of the document is extremely important in determining the kind of information the IEP records. It is not surprising to find that where there is no heading for any particular component, that component was not included. Some forms omitted headings of, and spaces for essential components. For example some forms did not have a section for assessment data.

One of the issues discussed in the teacher focus groups was a need for standardisation of forms. The devolved education system in New Zealand contributes to this lack of standardisation.

It can be argued that far from being a negative aspect this is a positive characteristic. IEP teams are free to develop forms and formats for recording what they find useful. There is much merit in this argument but only if the resulting formats meet the needs for which they are required. There are two such needs. The first is resource allocation. The Special Education Service is under a direction from the ministry that an IEP must accompany a request for resources. Some offices of the Special Education Service issue leaflets as guidelines, others recommend the use of their manual. Resources are allocated across the region, and the country using documents which appear to vary quite widely. It might be considered reasonable to expect that, where resources are allocated across schools, districts and regions, that there are clearly communicated guidelines and training on what are the essential components of an IEP. In the absence of essential information (perhaps obtained via a uniform document), equity across districts may well not be served. On the other hand, in at least one district, the manager has noted that IEPs do not play a significant part in resource allocation. because only the highest priority needs are resourced, the characteristics of the students involved are well known to the service staff, and that is sufficient information on which to make decisions.

The second purpose is classroom planning. Here, variation in approach to format and process is important only in the sense that omissions and lack of clarity could leads to poorly developed individual programming. Given what is revealed in this study, it appears likely that such problems could well exist.

If it is to be argued there is, indeed, sufficient training and suitable guidelines, a question remains. Why is there such wide variation in the IEPs reviewed in this report?

Is there a need then, for standardised forms? This is an issue that should be considered in the context of our now devolved system.

It should be noted that despite the movement to mainstreaming and inclusion, there is no section in the IEP documents for listing strategies to ensure the inclusion of the student. A heading for inclusionary strategies might signal the importance of this to the IEP team and shift the present focus from non-inclusive remediation.

Who Attends IEP Meetings?

The details in the results are the numbers of those who are recorded as attending the meeting. The study did not cross check the actual attendance with that documented. This would have been outside the resources and scope of the task. There was an assumption that the document would accurately reflect the team membership but this may not have been the case..

The low level of recorded attendance of parent, class teachers and students should be noted. This is a somewhat disconcerting finding as the parent and class teacher should be the key figures in the process. This may well be an indication of less than rigorous record keeping. In the focus group discussions both teachers and parents identified the need to involve the student more.

An advantage of IEPs mentioned in the teacher focus groups was the access it facilitated to outside agencies. Outside agencies are recorded as having attended just over one third of the time. A member of the Special Education Service was present at one meeting in six. The focus group discussions highlighted the strong views parents held about professionals attending the meetings if they had no first hand knowledge of their child. It appeared that parents appreciated the expertise of other professionals but only if they could contribute first hand information about the student.

The support person most often recorded as present was the special education teacher.

Inclusionary Strategies

The goal of mainstreaming is to include students in the social and academic life of the regular classroom as much as possible. This study therefore examined the nature of the teaching strategies to gauge whether they would promote high levels of interaction with peers. A strategy was designated inclusionary if it was implemented as part of whole class or small group instruction. There was a low level of inclusionary strategies found in the documents.

A number of possible hypotheses could be suggested for this. The IEP process may be concentrating on the "special" elements of the student's programme. The focus may be on the services and strategies the student requires over and above the usual classroom

programme and it may be that it is only these special areas that are recorded. This could only be verified by further follow up work with teachers in the classroom.

The nature of the strategies recorded may be influenced by the resource function of the IEP document. If a request is being made for discretionary resources then it is likely that the need for those resources will be highlighted in the nature of the programme planned for the student. Most discretionary resources come in the form of teacher aide hours. Most of the strategies in the IEP document required one:one assistance.

It is important at times to examine the administrative structures in place to ensure that they facilitate and do not impede our educational goals. Rowan's (1992) study indicated that teacher aide time could have a negative influence on a child's verbal interaction with peers. The IEP system might well be encouraging a mental set towards individual tuition rather than to a more inclusionary model of peer interaction and curriculum adaptation. This issue is taken up in the section on implications for the future.

Training

There were several indicators in the research of a perception among parents and teachers of a need for more training. Only half of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire had had training and only half of these considered that training to be good or excellent.

Training came up as an issue in all the focus groups; it was highlighted as a major issue in the questionnaire results.

Undoubtedly, there are areas indicated in this study, such as technical skills of assessment and setting objectives, and the process skills of communication that would respond to well planned and implemented training programmes. However, the research literature would suggest that this will not prove a panacea. In the United States, research studies show remarkably consistent findings of a less than adequate IEP process over a period of fifteen years despite high levels of training input.

Consideration should be given to the nature of the training that would lead to better outcomes for students with special needs in classrooms. It may be that more intensive and targeted training should not necessarily be aimed at increasing skills in the IEP process. It seems highly probable that greater value would be gained in targeting training at enskilling teachers in highly effective teaching practices, particularly those which, in keeping with the new curriculum framework, emphasise interactive teaching, authentic learning and strategies for teaching mixed ability classes and the inclusion of all students.

Parent and Teacher Perceptions of the IEP

Certain elements of the IEP process were rated highly on all three measures (parent and teacher focus groups and questionnaire). These were:

- communication between parents and teachers
- teamwork/support
- focus on and identification of students' needs

This would indicate that three of the most important principles of the IEP process - that all those with an interest in the child consult together to focus on the student's needs in order to plan to meet those needs - are valid ones which meet with general approval.

What comes through very clearly is that there is a high level of satisfaction with the process despite its shortcomings. Any revision of the IEP process should therefore aim to preserve and strengthen these extremely important features.

How to Improve the Process

A number of disadvantages and dissatisfactions were identified along with some suggestions for improvement. Again there was a high level, of agreement across the different data gathering methods and high level of agreement between teachers and parents. Issues that were identified most frequently were:

- imbalance of power between parents and professionals;
- need for training;
- cultural issues.

In addition, teachers identified lack of time as a major disadvantage.

Parents made a number of suggestions of how the balance of power might be redressed, all of which could be implemented readily. The most important of these was that they wished to have a greater input into the process and to have more control over who attended the meetings.

All the parents in the focus groups were pakeha and there was one Samoan teacher in the teacher groups. All were aware of the possible needs of differing cultural groups. This is an area that should be followed up in depth in future research.

Many of the suggestions for improvement of the process could be readily implemented by increasing awareness among professionals of the needs of parents.

FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

This study identifies a number of strengths and weaknesses in the IEP process as it is implemented in New Zealand at present. It also identifies actions that could be taken to improve the process - more training for professionals and parents, time allocation to teachers for the development of IEPs and greater sensitivity on the part of professionals to the needs of parents.

These conclusions are similar to those found in the North American literature (Smith 1990a). Smith, however, argues that the power of these actions to improve IEPs remains uncertain. He goes on to say that:

> *As practitioners perhaps we should acknowledge the IEP as nonviable and impractical and pursue other methods that show evidence of "specially designed instruction." Although a new approach may be a viable alternative, only a renewed and compelling IEP debate will lead to specific solutions.* (p12)

Smith advocates a "vigorous revisitation of the IEP process" (p12) and a research shift from analysing the process and document, to identifying methods of prescribing appropriate instruction for all students.

It would appear timely for us to follow Smith's suggestion of a "vigorous revisitation" of the IEP concept in light of the far reaching changes in both curricula and assessment that are taking place in New Zealand at present. IEPs were introduced to New Zealand before the major changes of Tomorrow's Schools and the subsequent developments of the NZQA framework and the Ministry of Education's major curriculum developments.

One of the salient questions for special education at this point must be, "What is the place of IEPs in the context of the new curriculum and assessment initiatives?"

There has, in fact, been relatively little debate, in light of these initiatives, on what the curricular base for special education should be. Historically, in the segregated system, separate curricula programmes were devised for special schools and special classes. With the advent of mainstreaming and the movement to inclusion, clear intentions regarding curriculum for students with special needs have yet to be outlined.

Examination of the American research literature shows a similar debate taking place regarding the Regular Education Initiative and the move to institutionalising standards for educational performance. Pugach and Warner (cited in Sands, Adams and Stout 1995) maintain that there are two main views on the curricular functions of IEPs. One view is that the general education curriculum is too narrow to support the needs of students with disabilities. Thus each student's curriculum is developed in the IEP based on needs and with little reference to the general education curriculum. Sands, Adams and Stout (1995) found in their study that teachers believed that the IEP constitutes the curriculum for students with disabilities.

The other view, (Falvey, Coots, Bishop and Grenot-Scheyer, 1989) is that the IEP is a reference, based on educational needs, for placing a student within a standard curriculum. The IEP is therefore a means of documenting recommendations for instructional and curricular adaptations and modification.

Sands, Adams and Stout (1995) point out that this view means that special and general educators have a shared mission, values and beliefs about teaching and learning that will lead to meaningful outcomes for **all** students.

It would appear that the Ministry of Education has given a clear direction in New Zealand towards the second of these views. In the New Zealand Curriculum Framework (1993), the official policy document for teaching, learning and assessment in New Zealand schools, it is clearly stated that:

> *the New Zealand Curriculum applies to:*
>
> - *all New Zealand schools, including kura kaupapa Maori and special education schools;*
>
> - *all students, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, belief, ability or disability.* (p3)

The document sets out a wide definition of curriculum, stating that the formal planned curriculum is one factor amongst many which influence learning.

> *Learning is shaped by the diverse experiences, values and cultural beliefs which students bring from their informal learning. Students' learning opportunities at school will be affected by a range of factors, such as classroom interaction patterns, access to resources, and the expectations, attitudes and behaviour of family, teachers and peers. The principles seek to ensure that the day-to-day practices of schools reinforce the formal curriculum.* (p6)

There is little doubt that to accommodate the diverse needs of the range of students in our schools today, the curriculum and traditional teaching approaches must be adapted and modified. Educational planning for students with special needs must take into account:

- recognition of the national curriculum;
- the inclusion of all students;
- strategies to achieve those goals.

Thinking in special education has been influenced by the American term "least restrictive environment" - a concept that encourages integration of students with special needs into the mainstream at as high a level of integration as is possible. The starting point of this thinking is exclusion with efforts being made to develop strategies to ensure the successful integration of the student. However, the curriculum framework document and the strategic direction document of the Ministry of Education, "Education for the 21st Century" (1994) clearly establish a system with a starting point of inclusion of all.

An education system which enables full access and participation to those students with disabilities. (Education for the 21st Century, p26).

A cognitive shift appears to be required - a move from the notion of integration and the least restrictive environment (LRE) to most inclusive practice (MIP). The starting point is the national curriculum, in its widest sense and how that can be modified and adapted to meet the needs of the diverse range of students in our schools today.

This gives us a context in which to review the present practice of the IEP. As has been stated earlier in this report, the present IEP process with its link to resources may be counterproductive and possibly lessen inclusionary practice.

The work of Udvari-Solner (1994, 1995) provides a model for examination and consideration as an alternative to IEPs. She advocates a curricular adaptation decision making process, the end product of which is a Curriculum Adaptations Plan (CAP). Udvari-Solner conducted a qualitative study to examine the adaptive strategies and instructional decisions made by general and special educators as they attempted to include students with disabilities. She outlines the underlying principles of curriculum adaptation (1995). Curriculum adaptations should:

- enable students to have reciprocal exchanges with their peers;
- increase active participation;
- reduce the level of abstraction of curriculum materials;
- make curricula relevant to the students' current and future life;
- create a match between the student's learning style and the instructor's teaching style.

Udvari-Solner (1994) operationalises the process to select and utilise appropriate adaptation as an eight component decision-making model. By addressing eight key questions teachers are guided to consider changes in the structure of instruction, demands and evaluation criteria of the task, learning environment, the way the task is done and the student's support structure. The strategies move from the least intrusive modification to more intrusive means. See Appendix C for further details of the model and Appendix D for an adaptation of the model being trialed with a small group of teachers (B L McDonald, personal communication, October, 1995).

Many of the adaptations to the curriculum outlined by Udvari-Solner (1994) such as cooperative groups, peer partners, peer tutors, thematic units, experiential lessons, community referenced lessons are just those methods recommended for the delivery of the new curriculum. (Brown and Thomson, 1995).

Udvari-Solner does not mention the role of parents in her research. However, her model in no way precludes the involvement of and consultation with parents. What has come through clearly in the research is that the communication between parents and professionals, with the purpose of planning an appropriate programme based on the needs of the child is a valued element of the IEP process by all involved. These elements, clearly must be retained and strengthened in any revision of present practice.

However, Udvari-Solner's model allows this within the context of what we are calling "most inclusive practice" (MIP).

Curriculum adaptation plans and the model of Udvari-Solner (1995) demand serious consideration in any review of methods of ensuring an equitable environment for all children.

Careful consideration and debate about the IEP process is undoubtedly required. That debate should be carried out in the wider context of general education and should not be limited to improving the present system. Sand, Adams and Stout's (1995) summing up of the situation in the United States is applicable to the New Zealand situation:

> *We believe that further inquiry and definition of relationship between the IEP and the curriculum of public education is of utmost importance to the field. We must clarify what is "special" about special education. For example, if IEPs are the curriculum we must have avenues to both define and ensure comprehensive educational opportunities for students with disabilities. .... If IEPs highlight the value added to the school curriculum special educators will need to know how to analyse and then translate that curriculum to make it accessible for their students. The magnitude of this issue demands that we fervently research the nature and use of curriculum in special education on a national basis.* (p80).

Consideration should now be given to ways in which the concept of the most inclusive practice (MIP) and curriculum adaptation plans (CAPs) could be introduced. It is the view of the authors that these concepts might be more appropriate to the more inclusive nature of the new curriculum framework in New Zealand. The model goes beyond the IEP which is clearly a less than satisfactory approach both in its place of origin, the USA and in our own setting in New Zealand.

CONCLUSIONS

The IEP has assumed a central position in the organisation of learning programmes for students with special teaching needs. The pattern of IEP use in New Zealand has closely mirrored that in the United States where the method was developed.

IEPs now play a major part in defining teaching programmes in special education. They are also required to obtain allocation of additional resources from the Special Education Service. The dual function of the IEP may well have contrasting purposes with the demand for resources playing a dominant role in IEP writing.

A large and representative sample of IEPs were examined in this study. A predominant feature in the analysis of the IEP documents was the idiosyncratic way in which many of them were constructed, the lack of clarity in many of the objectives and the lack of congruence between objectives and strategies - where these were stated at all. So many examples of IEP documents were found to lack any data on current student performance that some doubt must be entertained on the notion that IEPs represent effective planning tools or resource allocation documents.

Despite these apparent difficulties, teachers and parents report value in both the process and the outcome of the IEP. The emphasis both parties place on communication, the focus upon the needs of the student and the collaborative effort in planning support for students are highlights of this investigation.

Bringing these two major features of this study together one is struck by the obvious advantage of collaborative planning in the interest of students with special teaching needs. One cannot fail, however to notice that, taken purely at face value, the IEP documents themselves do not stand up to careful scrutiny. This leads to a conclusion, perhaps, that the notion of collaborative planning and the focus on needs appears to produce a feeling of empowerment and purpose.

Planning is perceived as helpful but the documents are insufficient. It seems likely that the documents do not represent the common planning practice of teachers. It is perhaps timely to consider the development of a more effective planning instrument.

The IEP is now twenty years old as a practice. There may be more effective means for teachers and parents to address the ways in which students with special teaching needs can participate in the new curriculum framework.

While we could refine our present practice and fine tune the formats, develop better guidelines, offer more training and encourage professionals to be more sensitive to the needs of parents, perhaps it would be more productive to look to a new model. Such a model would need to be more in keeping with the inclusive nature of the curriculum framework statements and the move to mainstreaming in our schools. It appears from the more recent literature both from the United States and New Zealand, that the establishment of cooperative classrooms and interactive teaching methods aids

inclusion. Curriculum adaptations at different levels of intrusiveness assist in the inclusion of students with a range of needs.

The issue of training which arises so often in the literature and among teachers and parents is one that needs particular consideration. It is our view, based upon the way in which the sample IEP documents were written, that training should not be focused merely on the IEP process but on the development of effective teaching practices for the diverse needs of all students. The curriculum framework clearly sets an expectation that teachers will do this. The difficulty in effecting such practice lies, it seems, in the capacity of teachers to identify, plan for and manage programmes for students significantly different from the regular classroom population. The documents we reviewed reveal some difficulties for teachers in specifying a student's current levels of skill and attainment and in identifying the incremental steps in dealing with this. It would appear that making the starting point the student's deficits frequently leads to remedial,individual programmes which are exclusionary. Little or no attention is paid in the documents to the classroom climate, inclusionary practices and curriculum adaptations with which every classroom teacher must deal.

It appears to the writers that a better starting point would be the classroom programme, a strategic model of classroom practice, and skill in adapting the curriculum.

This was a small , but representative study of the use of IEPs in New Zealand. The results are useful in assisting us to reflect upon the place of IEPs. There is a need, however, for further inquiry before final conclusions can be drawn.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The use of IEPs for the dual purpose of planning and access to resources should be reviewed.

2. Research into the appropriateness of the IEP process for different cultural groups should be considered.

3. The concept of most inclusive practice (MIP) should be explored further.

4. Curriculum adaptation plans should be trialled in order to assess their viability as an alternative to IEPs

5. Training in the MIP model should be offered to teachers who have students with special teaching needs in their classes.

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APPENDIX A DEFINITIONS

GOAL - A statement of long term aims. May be expressed in general terms.

OBJECTIVE - A statement of what the child will be able to demonstrate in a measurable way as an outcome of the programme.

ASSESSMENT STATEMENT - A statement of what the students attainment's are at present.

DATA BASED - Quantitative measures of behaviour.

eg. reading at an 8 year level
can write half a page independently
can sit on the mat for no more than 2 minutes

DESCRIPTIVE - A clear statement of behaviour. A description of actual observable behaviour without any quantitative information.

eg. is not able to sit quietly on the mat
will settle to tasks in the morning

Statements implying value judgements will not be marked

eg. is rather dreamy
lacks interest

PROCESS STATEMENT - A procedure, set of procedures or process which the teacher will go through which neither describes an outcome or states a strategy

TEACHING STRATEGY - A method or technique which is directly targeted at achieving an outcome. Outlines the details of how the child will be facilitated to reach the outcome.

INCLUSIVE - Any activities involving the student with peers, groups or whole class

INDIVIDUAL - Student working on their own in the classroom

ONE- TO-ONE - Student working alongside a person on one-to-one tuition eg. teacher aide, class teacher, itinerant teacher

APPENDIX B QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. I received training in the use of IEPs.

☐ Yes ☐ No

If no go to question 4.

2. I consider that the training I received for implementing the IEP process was:

☐ Not satisfactory ☐ Adequate ☐ Good ☐ Excellent

3. I received my training from:

☐ A colleague

☐ SES

☐ Special Education Teacher

☐ College of Education

☐ Other (please specify)

4. I consider that to assist me in teaching student(s) in my class who have special needs the IEP process is:

☐ Not Helpful ☐ Helpful ☐ Very Helpful ☐ Extremely Helpful

5. I consider that for teaching purposes the IEP document is:

☐ Not Useful ☐ Useful ☐ Very Useful

6. Would you take part in the IEP process if there was no requirement to do so for resources

☐ Yes ☐ No

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7 What do you see as the major advantages of the IEP process (Tick all that apply)

- ☐ Communication with parents
- ☐ Support from colleagues
- ☐ Identification of teaching needs
- ☐ Ideas for teaching
- ☐ Access to outside agencies
- ☐ Others (please specify)

8. What do you see as the major disadvantages: (Tick all that apply)

- ☐ Time consuming
- ☐ Lack of consultation with teacher
- ☐ Cultural bias
- ☐ Threatening for some parents
- ☐ Lack of training
- ☐ Lack of support
- ☐ Others (please specify)

9 In which ways do you think the process could be improved?

10. Please comment on any aspects of the process that you wish that have not been covered above

Thank you for the time you have taken to fill this in. We appreciate your help.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONAL PLAN Date:_____	DO CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE IN:		
Content Area/Subject: Instructor: Estimated Time: Activity:	Instructional Arrangement?	Lesson Format?	Delivery of Instruction Teaching Style?
      Materials:	Academic & Social Goals? Evaluation System?	Social/Physical Environment Conditions or Lesson Location?	Instructional Materials?
	Level of Personal Assistance?	Any Other Adaptations or Considerations?	

Figure 1. Curriculum adaptation planning form.

APPENDIX D MODIFICATION OF CAPs

CURRICULUM ADAPTATION PLAN (CAP)

Name of student:_____ Class:_____ Date(s):_____

Content area/subject:_____

Class activities / procedures/ tasks/ etc:

_____

_____

_____

Class learning outcomes:

_____

_____

_____

Adaptations		
Instructional Arrangements:	Lesson Format:	Teaching Style:
Adapted Goals and Evaluation:	Social/Physical environment	Instructional Materials:
Level of Personal Assistance	Any other Adaptations or Considerations	